

Lincoln National Forest Notice of Continuation of Existing Travel Management Policy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2005, the Forest Service published the final travel management regulations governing off-highway vehicles and other motor vehicles (MV) on National Forests and National Grasslands. The new regulations amended part 212, subpart B of part 251, subpart A of part 261, and removed part 295 of Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations. These three regulations are referred to as the Travel Management Rule (Rule). The Rule was developed in response to the increased use of off-highway vehicles on National Forest System Lands and related damage to natural and cultural resources on Federal lands. The Rule is consistent with provisions in Executive Order 11644 and Executive Order 11989 regarding off-road use of motor vehicles on Federal lands.

The Rule “provides for a system of National Forest System (NFS) roads, motorized trails and areas on National Forest System Lands that are designated for motor vehicle use. Motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside of designated areas is prohibited (36 CFR 212.50)”. In designating routes, the responsible official may include the limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of certain designated routes solely for the purposes of dispersed camping or retrieval of big game. Therefore, under the Rule, the Lincoln National Forest (LNF) will designate routes and areas on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM) and make it available to the public.

The Rule also provides that public notice with no further public involvement is sufficient, if a National Forest has made previous administrative decisions, which restrict motor vehicle use of the entire National Forest to designated routes and no change is proposed to these previous decisions and designations.

In order to comply with the new travel management regulation, the Lincoln National Forest initiated a forest-wide Travel Analysis Process in 2006. Results from this process are documented in the “*Travel Analysis Report for the Lincoln National Forest*” (TAP) available at www.fs.fed.us/r3/lincoln/projects/TMR/index.shtml.

The (LNF) implemented a designated motor vehicle travel system through the Record of Decision of the Land and Resource Management Plan in 1986. Current LNF policy includes prohibition of motor vehicle use off designated routes with the exception of traveling up to 300 feet from designated routes to access dispersed campsites.

Current Forest policy does not allow cross-country MV use for big game retrieval. Input from the public and agencies such as the NM Game and Fish Department did not identify a need for change.

The Forest reviewed input from several rounds of public meetings conducted in six affected cities and villages. Over 900 public comments were received during this process. In addition, an internal assessment of existing Forest Plan direction and the environmental implications of that policy were completed. Based

on this information, the Forest Supervisor has issued notice (36 CFR 212.52 (a)) to continue implementation of the current Forest policy directing management of our designated motorized travel system. This notice includes continuation of the current exemption of motorized access only for the purpose of dispersed camping up to 300' from designated motorized routes.

The LNF has reviewed its existing designated system of roads and trails for motorized vehicle (MV) travel. This review included ongoing public input and coordination with Tribal, State, county, and local governments. We have gathered information that has helped us evaluate the LNF existing travel management policy to ensure it is consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule. Through this analysis and the TAP, we concluded that the existing policy of prohibiting motorized use off designated roads and trails has generally resulted in improvement for public enjoyment and resource protection. Site-specific areas that are being negatively impacted by motorized use have been identified and will be addressed through project-level analyses.

A Travel Management Implementation Strategy has been developed and will be implemented. This strategy includes: An annual program of work outlining signing, road and trail maintenance schedules, review of designated travel routes and exemptions, identification of needs to make changes to the system or exemptions, and annual distribution of the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

Through recent public involvement and policy assessment we have identified site-specific areas in need of change. These changes will be considered as future projects are analyzed.

COMPARISON OF EXISTING FOREST PLAN DIRECTION WITH TRAVEL MANAGEMENT RULE

The Lincoln National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) was reviewed to assess compliance with the Travel Management Rule (Rule) (36 CFR 212 and 261). Appendix A displays the Rule's section-by-section comparison to existing management direction from the Forest Plan.

The existing Forest Plan contains adequate direction to implement the Rule. Major components include:

- Designation of a Forest-wide system of roads and trails appropriate for motorized vehicle use;
- Management area-specific guidelines for timing and other restrictions;
- Exemptions for motorized vehicle access only for the purpose of dispersed camping up to 300' from designated roads and trails;
- Process for identifying changes needed in the system and exemptions, including criteria for designation of roads, trails, and areas;
- Identification of a minimum road system;
- Procedures to identify unneeded roads;
- Procedures for coordinating with other public roads entities;
- Policy for acquiring and granting access, including maintenance by instrument holders;
- Monitoring process to identify changes needed; and
- Process for public involvement.

OVERVIEW OF DESIGNATED TRAVEL ROUTES

Chapter 7 of the Travel Analysis Process (TAP) summarizes recommendations for change resulting from a value-risk assessment. Categories chosen to rank value and risk were based on the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212.55) and locally identified issues. Some roads closed to public use are needed for administration, resource program management, or resource protection and will continue to be maintained at a custodial level to retain past investments, as per Forest Plan direction. Some roads not needed to deliver resource management programs are identified in the TAP, and will be considered for obliteration or other method of removing them from the existing road system. Access needed to deliver other Forest Service programs will be administered through other management tools such as grazing permits or timber sale contracts. The public also identified a number of opportunities to increase or decrease motorized access by adding or eliminating roads and motorized trails on the designated motorized travel system.

Changes to the existing road and motorized trail system will generally be made through projects carried out in the future after appropriate environmental analysis has been completed.

OVERVIEW OF 300' FIXED DISTANCE TO DISPERSED CAMPSITES

The LNF has over 20 years experience in administering the existing travel management policy. Options to the existing 300' fixed distance motorized access to dispersed campsites were considered including; 1) designated routes (short spur routes) for dispersed camp site access, 2) a permit system to manage access, 3) designated areas open to cross country MV travel (see Appendix B), and 4) more limited use of a specified distance (up to 100') from a designated route.

In addition, an internal assessment of existing Forest Plan direction and the environmental results of that policy were completed. This assessment is documented in this report.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Forest reviewed input from several rounds of public meetings conducted in six affected cities and villages. In addition, over 900 comments were received from individuals. These comments ranged from prohibiting motorized use on most forest roads and trails, to opening up more roads and trails to motorized use. We also received comments about motorized access to dispersed campsites. Reducing the fixed distance to 100' was proposed and shared with the public at several rounds of public meetings. The majority of commenters asked the LNF to retain the 300' fixed distance. We have documented specific roads, trails, and areas about which we received comments.

Public comments about specific roads, trails, and areas will be maintained and used as opportunities arise. For example, if a project is being proposed in the Moore Canyon area and we have comments about specific roads or trails in that area, we will use the comments in considering proposed changes to the travel system as we analyze the project. We may also analyze proposed changes to the travel system as stand-alone projects, as time and funding permits.

Comments about the LNF travel system received in the future will be maintained with the comments collected during analysis of the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Annual Program of Work

The LNF will institute an annual program of work for on-going implementation of the Rule.

Signing

Each year the LNF will develop a priority list of signs needed for road, trail, and motorized access to dispersed campsites.. As budgets allow, informational and interpretive signing may also be included.

Road Maintenance Schedule

The LNF will continue to maintain NFS roads and NFS trails in accordance with their management objectives, the availability of funds, and annual priority established in the road maintenance strategy.

Annual Review of Designated System and Exemptions

Each District's annual program of work will continue to identify changes needed to the existing travel management system. Education efforts will be a key component of Rule implementation. In addition, where unauthorized use is occurring, managers will work with law enforcement to reduce and redirect that use.

Identification of Need for Change

Changes in roads, trails, and access to dispersed camping sites will continue to be identified. Through the TAP and the existing condition assessment for the 300' fixed distance, the Forest has identified a number of changes needed. When possible, these proposed changes will be integrated with other projects, such as vegetation management.

Annual Distribution of Motor Vehicle Use Map

A Motor Vehicle Use Map developed according to national standards will be issued annually, as directed by the Rule and identified in our Forest Plan.

CONCLUSION

Based on this information, the Forest Supervisor will issue notice (36 CFR 212.52 (a)) to continue implementation of the current Forest policy directing management of our designated motorized travel system. This notice includes continuation of the current exemption of motorized access only for the purpose of dispersed camping up to 300' from designated motorized routes. A Forest Plan Correction Notice contains minor wording changes that better aligns the Forest Plan direction with language used in the Rule.